

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES SAFEGUARD THE HEALTH  
OF ALL VIRGINIANS, EVERY DAY, EVERYWHERE**

*National Nurses Week is May 6-12*

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Whether it’s an outbreak of tuberculosis, norovirus or salmonella infections linked to peanut butter, Virginia’s public health nurses are on the front lines of the investigation, helping protect citizens of the Commonwealth. Virginia Department of Health (VDH) nurses work with epidemiologists, doctors and other partners to identify the cause and control the spread of the disease within communities. VDH’s public health nurses are there every day, protecting the health of the 7.6 million citizens of Virginia.

Joyce Lewis, R.N., works to improve the health of citizens in the Three Rivers Health District every day. She was recently named VDH’s Public Health Nurse of the Year, and will serve as an ambassador for VDH in 2007. One of Lewis’ responsibilities is the health district’s telemedicine project. Patients who live in the Northern Neck typically have to travel to Richmond or Charlottesville to receive specialized care. With telemedicine, a specialist can use technology like video conferencing to see a patient, saving travel time and money by allowing the patient to stay in his home town. Along with managing the project and operating the technology, Lewis networks with private physicians and other health agencies in the community, marketing the advantages of telemedicine.

“Public health nurses like Joyce are really the backbone of our public health system,” said VDH Director of Public Health Nursing Joanne Wakeham, R.N., Ph.D. “They are our eyes and ears in the community; they identify the issues and develop the responses that help improve everyone’s health.”

The goal of public health is to prevent disease, illness, or injury before it happens, improving the health of an entire population. To control the spread of contagious diseases, public health nurses help spot trends of symptoms in emergency rooms, and they interview patients and identify exposures. They promote healthy habits to prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Public health nurses help entire families by assisting doctors in providing prenatal care, teaching parents how to keep their children safe, and helping prevent and manage chronic disease.

Public health nurses are in high demand today. They are prepared to respond 24/7 to emerging public health threats such as pandemic flu and bioterrorism. But many experienced nurses are expected to retire from VDH in the next few years, and public health nursing is often overlooked as a career path.

“As a public health nurse for 40 years, I have seen time and again the positive impact we can have on our fellow citizens’ quality of life,” said Wakeham. “We need more nurses, both experienced nurses and recent graduates, to help ensure the health of future generations.”

For more information about careers in public health nursing, visit [www.vdh.virginia.gov/nursing](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/nursing).

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